

## HISTORIC DESIGNS IN PLACE MAKING: POETICS AND POLITICS OF STREET FURNITURE, 1755-1938

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### Summary

At the present time, public spaces are seen as the support of collective life. They reflect the inhabitant's culture and create the image of a place. They include a continuous public realm that reflects the image and identity of the city as it accommodates the many activities - individually or in-group - that make up public life and social interactions. The quality and image of these public spaces in the public perception is created by the cohesiveness of the public realm – the facades, squares, streets, open spaces, etc. – together with the street furniture contained within their structure. This paper will briefly describe the urban development of the city of Lisbon after the big earthquake in 1755 till near 1938, and the emergence of street furniture within this scenery. It will also identify the importance of knowing the relevance and effects of historical urban furniture elements in today's inhabitants' local memory and to understand its influence in users and in the overall environment.

### Introduction

The time period defined for this paper – between 1755 and 1938 – justifies itself for taking place in an interval marked by two of the most significant periods in Portugal's history and also in the city of Lisbon while capital of the nation. In 1755 took place the tragic earthquake<sup>2</sup> that destroyed great part of Lisbon and from this day on the intervention in the city planning assumed very different contours. In 1938 started a new political government marked by a dictatorial regime.

It was only after the 1755's earthquake that Lisbon urban development starts being thought, programmed and built, for the first time in six centuries of existence (França, 2000). This new urban planning approach also reflects a different attitude facing the relation between the mass of buildings and the empty space of the public realm, programming the public spaces with their diverse multiplicity of components. The year of 1938 becomes related with a change of political directions that remained for 37 years<sup>3</sup>. This period of time requires itself an independent study since it has enough material to be studied in another paper. Effectively the attitude of the Salazar's political government - as any totalitarian leadership - was also defined by the need to place in urban space symbolic elements that acclaim and celebrate the nation and his political authority.

Therefore this nearly two century's period selected reflect the beginning of a well structured planning of the city where the first elements of street furniture started to become visible.

### The growth phases in the city of Lisbon

It is after 1755 that Lisbon begins to growth towards north, turning her *face* against the river side. The *illuminist* spirit urban plans that have risen from the rubbles of the old city demonstrate the intentions of the *Pombalino's*<sup>4</sup> architects towards the inevitability of the city growth heading north (Moita, 1982). These plans were structuralized according to an urban model made of an opened grid, where the two

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<sup>2</sup> On the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1755, a big earthquake ruined Lisbon's city centre and injured its adjacent areas. The destruction was concluded by a tidal wave coming from the river Tagus (*Tejo*) and by a destructive fire. The Prime Minister Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, future *Marquês de Pombal* (Marquis of Pombal) assigned the military engineer Manuel da Maia to conceive a project for the rebuilding of the destroyed areas.

<sup>3</sup> In 1938 António Oliveira Salazar became the leadership of Portugal, and institutes a regime of fascist dictatorship up to 1975, when by a military revolution the democracy in Portugal was set in. His regime was marked by economic, social and cultural development stagnation of the country, among other suppressions of fundamental rights.

<sup>4</sup> The period of time regarding the regency of Marquês de Pombal as king's D. José I prime minister, is known as *Pombalino*.

important previously existing public squares - *Praça do Rossio* and *Terreiro do Paço* - were kept and redefined. The first square is characterised for its popular occupation and traditional point of meeting.



*The actual Praça do Rossio*



*Praça do Comercio from the air*

Later on it became an ideal place to the expansion of cafes, theatres and restaurants. The second square represents the authority and its institutional spirit and is marked by king D. Jose I sculpture. During the Romantic period the hygienists began to concern with the healthiness and salubrity of public spaces and private constructions. This gave rise to a deep change in the way public spaces were perceived and characterized. In generally these changes can be summarized through the introduction of green elements in the composition of public spaces. The conception of densely wooded spaces, structuralized in accordance with romantic aesthetic principles, gave origin to places characterized by bucolic images, marked by public art pieces of intense symbolic connotation and by some pieces of street furniture that promote people to meet and stay.

The *Passeio Público* was also created within this spirit: as an urban garden surrounded by stone walls and iron fences located up north of *Praça do Rossio*. This kind of garden was completely new until that time, and was added to the new *illuminist* city program. It can also be defined as a new garden which location conscientiously points in the direction of the north urban development of Lisbon (França, 1987).

During the transition of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a truly enterprising attitude in the programmed expansion of the city took place, following what already had happen in other European countries. The need to expand the urban structure was used as an excuse to promote the programmed planning of the city. Once again the public spaces reflected the way of building up the city. As a result in the transition of the century the city public spaces were characterized by great avenues articulated by big squares.



*Sight of Avenida da Liberdade from the Monument to Marquês de Pombal*

The opening of the *Avenida da Liberdade* over the *Passeio Público* was an idea already launched in 1859, but only put into practice in 1879. It became the "Avenue" of the city of Lisbon, unchained from its traditional configuration. It can be defined as an axis of penetration in the territory that would be constructed along the twentieth century.

### **Public Space as a Support for the Implementation of Street Furniture**

Streets, squares and gardens had always been important elements to define and structure the urban space. They provide the most diverse activities: economical, cultural or social representations among others and through them it is possible to identify the genesis and to understand the development of the city. In fact, the history of the city can be explained through the way it has structured its own

public spaces. The relations that can be established between the inhabitants, the authorities and the expression of citizenship are inevitably expressed in places where citizens meet (Borja, 2001, p.17).

In general the public urban spaces are grouped in two great morphological categories: the linear and the non linear. The first ones denote an appeal for the circulation and the second ones for the sojourn. In the first case, the street can be considered the more basic form of its expression. It consists in a space that mixes both circulation and socialization issues, promoting the continuous circulation of people and vehicles and at the same time the possibility of citizens to socialize, as well as the practice of several activities of leisure and recreation. Sometimes the permanence of people in public space became the prolongation of their own home. The category of the non linear spaces - squares, gardens and parks – allowed the introduction of places where the relation between persons was privileged. Even though initially these spaces were restricted almost exclusively to the bourgeoisie, some cases became truly democratic spots inside the city.

It is within this context that street furniture emerges in Lisbon major public spaces. It was an answer to new needs and to support new activities, also reflecting the engagement towards the qualification of public spaces in the city. The requirements to define both pedestrian and transport spaces of circulation, and the endowment of comfort these same spaces definitively contributed to the creation and implantation of the firsts street furniture elements.

### **The Advent of Street Furniture**

Although the concept of street furniture is relatively new - about 30 or 40 years (Serra, 1998) – these elements began to emerge in urban landscape long before that. They started to respond to the demands and needs of different epochs. Some of them have served the same function to the present, but others have lost their primary role and have been transformed or just disappeared.

All over the main European cities the first examples of street furniture that appeared in the public space were, in general, the bollards, public water fountains and panels. The bollards had then different uses: in roman cities they were used to delimit the neighbourhoods, in other places they guaranteed the pedestrian space in borderless streets. In ancient Mesopotamia they served as a reference to disguise the 'divine' lands from the 'civil' lands.

The public water fountains were one of the most appreciated constructions by the citizens as it was one of the main important means for distributing water since several years ago, inhabitants did not have pipe water in their houses. In Pompeii many examples of these water fountains can still be found. Another street furniture element that has roots in roman cities is the public bathroom that responds to hygienic exigencies and individual comfort. The Emperor Vespasian transformed these facilities in the first taxed street furniture element as citizens had to pay for its use. It gave rise to the debate around the issue of 'free of charge' concerning public services that is still nowadays present in our society (Serra, 1998).

The development of medieval European cities resulted in the progress of street furniture. Although bollards and fountains continued to be the principal elements, the panels suffered an increasing growth as every merchant tried to attract their clients. Generally they used to be fixed perpendicularly to the facades in order to facilitate its reading. Its form varied from simple wood tablets to complex metallic structures. Usually they were aggressive, humoristic, very colourful and appropriators of public space. The need to regulate the public space in order to limit its invasion arose then.

### **The Lisbon Inspirations**

But it was necessary to wait for the appearance of identifiable space for street furniture – mainly sidewalks and gardens – to witness the expansion of street furniture in the cities. In the case of Lisbon the major development of street furniture had its roots in the early 1830's, following the natural growth of city. These elements were placed in public areas with the common purpose of offering a service to citizens. In order to fulfil the new human needs as they emerge in cities this service had very

different uses and functions: comfort, convenience, information, circulation, control, protection, recreation and other citizen demands, all of them changing forever the face and the environment of the city.



XIXth C. French Iron Cast Works at Praça do Rossio



XVIIIth C. Lamps at Praça do Comercio

The implantation of street furniture in the public spaces of Lisbon quickly instigates a new sociability between citizens. The furtherance of the daylight through the artificial light of the lamps, the spectacular increase of the amusement and diffusion of information, the conquer of territory by the younger and female public which had for the first time garden places to stay with benches, shadow and music, definitively changed the habits of the inhabitants of Lisbon. These elements became a reference within the urban landscape and a new urban culture arose then (Braga, 1995).

Generally the design of these elements were mere copies of British and French models, mostly the ones from the city of Paris. The few Portuguese designs from that time are all almost inspired in work of French designers. Furthermore, the French cast iron industry was so pungent on that time that its production was not only for Paris streets but also for all over France and abroad including Lisbon. These companies – Sommervoire (1836), Wassy (1839), Bar-le-Duc (1852) - all later acquired by Antoine Durenne (1822-1895), were along with Val d'Osne<sup>5</sup> leading-edge industrial producers and formal aesthetic dominants of the epoch. Other important transmission aspect of the Parisian model was the famous book '*Les Promenades de Paris*' published in 1867/73 by Charles-Adolphe Alphand, engineer that with Haussmann has transformed Paris by the impulse of Napoleon III.

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<sup>5</sup> A. Durenne and Val d'Osne associated each other in 1931 creating the GHM.

### The Authors

One of the first documented architects that designed numerous elements of street furniture was Malaquias Ferreira Leal (1787-1859)<sup>6</sup>. Author of several projects, (the most paradigmatic one was the renovation of the *Passeio Público* in Rossio) he designed water fountains, bollards, urinals, iron benches, among others. Pierre-Joseph Pézerat (1801-1872) was another architect-engineer<sup>7</sup> that contributed to the street furniture design of Lisbon. He has studied in the *Politéchnique* and in the *École des Beaux Arts* of Paris and his drawings were extremely rigorous and accurate. After the death of Ferreira Leal and during the long-lasting illness of Pézerat, another architect, Domingos Parente da Silva (1836-1901), became responsible for the municipality works.

In 1874 Frederico Ressano Garcia (1847-1911) became the head of the Technical Department of the Municipality of Lisbon. Graduated by the *Escola Politécnica de Lisboa* (1861-1865) and the *Impériale des Ponts et Chaussées* of Paris (1866-1869), Ressano Garcia was an accurate observer of the transformation of Paris by Napoleon III, operated by Haussmann, specifically the works of the *Second Réseau*. It is indeed with his nomination for the Municipality that a great technical transformation occurred due to his visionary character. His working group was composed by brilliant technicians like: José Luís Monteiro (1848-1942), appointed chief architect of the Municipality in 1878, and graduated by the *École des Beaux-Arts*, António Maria de Avelar (1854-1912), civil engineer and Augusto César dos Santos (ca. 1855-after 1900), architect responsible for the works and the pavements.

The successive projects for the city, namely the *Avenida da Liberdade* (1879), *Parque da Liberdade* and *Avenida das Picoas to Campo Grande* (1888) and *Plano Geral de Melhoramentos da Capital* (1903), imposed a new rhythm of urban production, including the design standardization of many street furniture elements where we can see a great influence from Davioud style.

### The First Street Furniture Elements

In the first decades of the 1800's Lisbon have only some street furniture elements. Numerous stone bollards<sup>8</sup> included in the Pombal plans for the reconstruction of Lisbon and some 'cegonha'<sup>9</sup> oil iron lamps designed by Martinho António de Castro (ca.1780). According to Lapa (1964) existed 718 oil lamps in 1788, 770 in 1792, 2784 in 1834 and 2303 in 1835. Braga (1995) refers that these two street furniture elements were the firsts with standardized drawings for Lisbon. The water fountain was another frequent street element of this period but their drawings were similar to the ones of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with less decorative elements.

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<sup>6</sup> Lisbon city architect since 1815.

<sup>7</sup> As he liked to sign his projects.

<sup>8</sup> *Frade* was at that time the Portuguese word for this element that also means Priest. Maybe is an analogy derived from its large and short shape with a round stone on the top?

<sup>9</sup> Stork in English.



Still existing "frades" in Lisbon

Despite some importance that street furniture gains in this epoch, some elements had disappeared or lost their first function. For instance the bollards that at a certain time had been substituted by sidewalks are nowadays extensively used. The bollards had a very atypical evolution, since they are one of the few elements that even though they lost their role as protagonists of public space delimiting elements during many years, they have been taken up again with the same primary function, and are nowadays all over Lisbon. The water fountains are another example since they have lost their important role within public space with the arrival of pipe water. Water fountains have been preserved and are still placed in some public spaces due to the tradition of its use and to the climate. Nowadays we can still find near 56 water fountains spread in the area of Lisbon. On the other way, in the north of Europe, with low temperatures, these elements have been disappearing giving way to ornamental fountains as elements of urban decoration.

One of the major factors that gave a huge impulse to the development of street furniture was the arrival of public transportation in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This phenomenon gave birth to a new typology of street furniture: the bus stop. In the beginning, its signal consisted in a simple pole, later taken over by the bus shelter. The public transport development has also produced the underground entrances as another new element of street furniture. One of the best examples of these entrances are the ones designed by Hector Guimard - Art Nouveaux avant-garde- for the first Parisian underground line in the year 1900. But the underground only arrived in Lisbon in the middle of the last century.



Examples of XIXth c. iron cast lamposts

Another element that has transformed significantly the city environment was the public street lighting. It wasn't until 1848 that gas for lighting was produced by a factory set up in *Avenida 24 de Julho* in Lisbon belonging to the *Companhia Lisbonense de Iluminação de Gaz*. As already referred street lighting was not new for the citizens of Lisbon since in 1780 Pina Manique<sup>10</sup> (1733-1805) inaugurated Lisbon public street lighting with 'cegonha' oil lamps. The illumination system with gaslight progressively substituted the oil system and rapidly began to play a fundamental role in the security of the citizens and also in the quality of Lisbon environment.

The first known appearance of the so-called public electric lighting happened at Chiado on 30th October of 1878 (*Rua dos Mártires, Chiado, Largo do Picadeiro, Praça de Camões, Largo das Duas Igrejas* and the terrace of Gibraltar hotel). These six voltaic arc "Jablochkoff" lamps-posts were equal of the ones from Paris Opera Square. They were constructed under the orders of the King Luís to illuminate the outdoor of Cidadela Palace in Cascais<sup>11</sup> during the royal family vacations. These lamps were offered by the King to Lisbon where they were exposed (by uncertain time) to the admiration and curiosity of the citizens (Simões, 1997)<sup>12</sup>.

The utilisation of gas and electricity was directly related with the urban development of Lisbon, and which became a major concern in the spatial organisation of Lisbon, with the creation of urban infrastructures and the establishing of parks and gardens. According to Matos *et al* (2004) "these measures guaranteed the safety and well-being of the citizens, while at the same time allowing the principles of hygiene, which were becoming more and more important, to be put into practice". These developments made available to the citizens from different social classes to benefit from the social and economic developments and to take advantage of leisure time and establishing social ties. For the first time social relations were moving away from domestic sphere, associations and private clubs.

The urban developments and improvements that took place during these period contributed not only for the citizens' well-being, safety and healthy air and embellishment of the city but also for the arrival of many other new street furniture elements. Given the scope of this paper it is impossible to detail every new element of street furniture. Nevertheless, among them it is important to refer

<sup>10</sup> General Supervisor of the Police.

<sup>11</sup> Cascais is a village in the outskirts of Lisbon, famous for its coastline.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Cruz, I. *Das Vantagens de Não Ser Precioso: Aspectos da Exploração e Uso Do Cobre em Portugal (1789-1889)*.



some iron and wood benches, several urinals and public bathrooms, different iron and stone drinking fountain, and various kiosks that we can still find in Lisbon. Some of them are not in their original place, some have lost their primary role, some unfortunately are in bad conditions and completely forgotten by the municipality. But above all as their forms and details came to have a permanent meaning in inhabitants mind, they all preserve an idea of legitimacy, and are therefore integrated in the memory of Lisbon citizens.



Mathurin Moreau Printemps allegory in the largo of the Graça



Chafariz de S. Paulo one of the still existing stone fountains

### Street Furniture and its *Monumentalization*

Even though today some street furniture elements are located in public places that have nothing in common with its original local, it still continues to exist innumerable pieces that resist to time and history. On one hand this leads us to the pertinence of only thinking the functionality of street furniture as objects of collective use placed within public space, on the other hand it guides us to the formal and functional specificities of street furniture that are able to evoke memories through its *monumentalization*.

According to Choay (2000) the original meaning of the expression Monument come from the Latin word Monumentum "... derived from monere (to warn, to remember): the one that induces the memory. The affective nature of the essential destination: it is not about to make ones verify, to supply neutral information, but to excite, by emotion, an alive memory" (Choay, 2000).

For this author the specificity of each monument "is related with its way of interfering with memory. Not only works memory, as it well mobilizes the mediation of affections, in a way to remember the past, making vibrate at present time" (Choay, 2000)

These remembrances of the past should call upon the "enchantment" of the object. But past remembrances are not everything since past reminiscences should "*contribute to keep and to preserve the identity of a place.*" (Choay, 2000).

Therefore the reflection around the *monumentalization* of street furniture arises several questions.

- Can street furniture contribute to preserve the memory and identity of a place?
- Can the displacement of street furniture from its original place annul its spatial contribution while monumentalized object?
- Can street furniture be considered a monument by the simple fact of having acquired a certain status through its own age?



XIXth C. french style streetbanks



Actual copy of one of the XIXth c. French kiosks

### Historical Value of Street Furniture

Some of these objects with historical value can exceed its purely functional dimension to become into “public art pieces” (Remesar *et al*, 2004). Within this context the above statement arise other questions: Can street furniture be considered public art only by having an historical load? Can street furniture gain the character of a monument? Can street furniture function be exceeded by its historical or artistic values? Or can street furniture simply coexist side by side with contemporary objects without missing its historical value?

Nowadays, some of the historical pieces that still subsist in some Lisbon public spaces, like gardens, squares, streets and plazas, share the same physical space with contemporary objects. It is easy to find some original pieces mixed with identical copies. For example, several original 19<sup>th</sup> century lamps that have been adapted to new technologies, changing from gas system to electric illumination, are side by side with other identical lamps manufactured years later. Although dissimulated, it is possible to identify these copies since the manufacturer is not the same and the material denunciates its historical value.

These historical elements of street furniture are preserved side by side with the new interventions that in major cases do not destroy the condition to support the memory of the place. Furthermore, we can only find these historical elements in public spaces with the same historical value.

Do copies of historical street furniture preserve the identity and memory of the place? Can historical street furniture only survive in places with the same historical memory? If we place these historical elements in new public spaces, could they survive?

### Closing Remarks

Some street furniture evokes memories and contributes to the identity of the place. Other are just restricted to its function while elements that configure the public spaces. In a world where memories can be disposal, the recovery of the history of specific public spaces through elements of street furniture, can send us back to the memory of the place. Street furniture can be an identity reference for the city besides being part of its cultural patrimony.

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